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Stone tool reference collection

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CHAPTER 2

Stone tool reference collection

1 - Introduction

(C. Thiébaut., É. Claud, A. Coudenneau, M. Deschamps, V. Mourre)

In order to address the questions raised in the introduction (see also Part I, chapter 1.1), we focused part of our research on identifying how different tools types considered typical of one of Bordes' *facies* or a particular techno-complex (Delagnes *et al.*, 2007) functioned.

Bifaces are commonly described as multi-functional tools (see Part I, chapter 2.10) despite the relatively limited number of available use-wear analyses of what often concerns small samples. This being the case, it was necessary to test this hypothesis with new techno-functional data. Similarly, Middle Palaeolithic notched tools are generally associated with woodworking and have not been the subject of any systematic experimentation, with the available functional analyses concerning only a limited number of artefacts (see Part I, chapter 2.7). Apart from rare exceptions, Mousterian flake cleavers, typical of the Vasconian, are known uniquely from the Franco-Cantabrian region. While it could be assumed that the robust active edge of these tools would serve for heavy-duty activities, to date no experimental work has confirmed this hypothesis and very little use-wear analysis has been carried out (see Part I, chapter 2.9). Our goal was therefore to document the potential uses of these tools in order to evaluate the oft-suggested cultural influences underlying the manufacture of this tool type. Finally, we also focused on better understanding the function of Middle Palaeolithic points whose morphological and technological variability could potentially reflect equally diverse functions (see Part I, chapter 2.8), particularly the use of points to arm hunting weapons and its wider implications for Middle Palaeolithic subsistence strategies.

In terms of other tool types (e.g. side scrapers, unmodified flakes), previously available reference collections built by several participants (Lemorini, 2000; Coudenneau, 2004; Claud, 2008) served as a basis for interpreting the archaeological material. For this reason, experiments specifically designed to investigate the use or analysis of these artefact types was unnecessary.

By better understanding the function of retouched Mousterian tools we hope to produce a clearer appreciation of the reality of Middle Palaeolithic facies, technological groups, or techno-complexes defined and used by a majority of prehistorians.

A second, more transversal, aspect of this research concerns the relationship between tool function and raw materials. The use of so-called "mediocre" raw materials, such as quartz and quartzite, is relatively frequent during the Middle Palaeolithic, with technological analyses now systematically including these materials. Certain of these studies have shown that debitage methods were specifically adapted to these materials, leading to the production of blanks with different characteristic forms (Jaubert, Mourre, 1996; Thiébaut *et al.*, 2009b). A widely held view is that quartz and quartzites were used only as substitutes for flint. Moreover, use-wear analyses in Middle Palaeolithic contexts have most often focused uniquely on flint, with other raw materials included only recently (Marquez-Mora, Preysler 2002; Borel, 2008; Cristiani *et al.*, 2009; Derndarsky, 2006; Plisson, 2008; Gibaja *et al.*, 2009; Clemente-Conte *et al.*, 2012; Lazuén, 2012a, 2012b; Lelouvier *et al.*, 2012; Cura *et al.*, 2014; Daffara *et al.*, 2014; Venditti, 2014; Lemorini *in* Jaubert *et al.*, in prep.; Annex 1). In order to test this hypothesis and evaluate to what extent blank type is connected to function, it was necessary to build experimental reference collections and develop a use-wear approach adapted specifically to these types of raw materials (see Part I, chapter 2.6).